



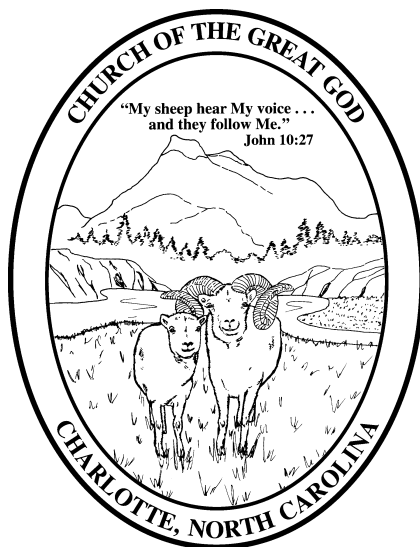
**FOR THE
PERFECTING
OF THE
SAINTS**

**Do
God's People
Need
a Church?**



*For the
Perfecting
of the
Saints*

DO GOD'S PEOPLE NEED A CHURCH?



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“A Church in the Grip of Distrust”

by John W. Ritenbaugh

“Do We Need Teachers?”

by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

“I Love Government!”

by Staff

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Second Printing, April 2001
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A Church in the Grip of Distrust!

Most of us are aware of a phenomenon that too often takes place within the church of God. It should not happen, but it does. This phenomenon is that if an attitude or trend begins to develop in the world, we can expect that it will soon enter the church. When it does, it shows that we are not as attuned to the Kingdom of God as we should be—that we are still too attached to the world.

A July 23, 1995, article in the *Washington Post* by Liz Spayd, reports the findings of the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago:

Faith in both Congress and the White House is hovering at a 20-year low. Only 12 percent of the public say they have a great deal of confidence in the executive branch, and slightly less than 8 percent characterize their confidence in Congress as substantial.

Trust in other institutions is also on a gradually descending slope: Expressed support for science, medicine, organized religion, labor and education are all near their low point since researchers began their biennial surveys in the mid-1970s. Earlier Lou Harris polls patterned on similar questions suggest the decline may actually have begun in the 1960s.

“This is one of the most dramatic developments in public opinion in the post-World War II era,” says Darrell West, a professor of political science at Brown University. “There is a deep-seated distrust, not just of government but of all kinds of institutions that people once had great confidence in.”

The article suggests the Kennedy assassinations, the disillusionment over Vietnam, the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up, the Iran-contra affair of the Reagan administration, the Whitewater scandal, the accusations of extramarital affairs by President Clinton, the suicide of Vincent Foster, Waco, Ruby Ridge and the Oklahoma City bombing as prime motivations of this growing distrust. In each case the government is perceived as being the actual cause of the event or as hiding the evidence that would clearly reveal the culprits.

Coincidentally, the August 28, 1995, issue of *Time* published a long article in which a large body of psychologists say that the American lifestyle itself is producing anxiety and depression in increasingly large numbers of people. Our lifestyle tends to isolate us from practices that were formerly communal affairs; individuals now bear family burdens that were once shared among many people. The frustration and perceived hopelessness of these situations creates depression. The psychologists accuse automobiles, suburban living, television, computers and abandoning the family farm, among other things, as causes of this problem. This problem, they say, has no solution because almost no one wants to give up his lifestyle.

As members of God's church, we do not live isolated from what is going on in the larger society. When the massive doctrinal changes took place in our former association, many within the church reacted in much the same way as those in the world react to disturbing events in areas that greatly concern them. From both within and without, we have been very masterfully set up to withdraw, accuse and very possibly rebel.

The Arch-Enemy at Work

Our dilemma is not nearly as complex or hopeless as the world's. We can unerringly pinpoint the real cause and agent of the distrust now abounding in the hearts of many in the church. After all, the Devil began this whole mess, called "the world" in the Bible, when he induced distrust for God's Word in the minds of Adam and Eve.

Through distrust, Satan seduced Adam and Eve away from submitting to the most wonderful, lovable, giving, concerned, sensitive and helpful Personality in all creation—God. Can you imagine that? The Devil convinced them that God could not be trusted!

Distrust is a powerful incentive whose fruit is divorce. Our first parents sinned and division began. The world has not been united since. When there is distrust, faith evaporates. Fear, anxiety and depression escalate, and the motivation to be personally secure and free from the hassles of coping intensifies. The "fight or flight" mechanism kicks in.

In our recent history, the most devastating blow struck against the church has *not* been in the area of doctrine. Radical changes of doctrine have merely been the means by which more serious underlying problems have been exposed. Except for a few doctrines, all the spin-off churches

of God that have formed within the last several years believe basically the same things. The major differences between us are in the areas of policy and attitude. Despite the doctrinal confusion introduced through the leadership of the parent organization, the doctrinal base established through Herbert Armstrong survived in the new groups.

In my opinion, the most damage was caused in the area of trust and loyalty. Members of the church have become suspicious, fearful and distrustful. Alarmed and confused by the doctrinal changes, we are fearful of being hurt and misled further. We are unsure whether *anybody*—especially the ministry—can be trusted, so we do not trust them or many lay members either. As a result, our loyalty to God, His truth and to each other has broken down even while we deny that it has happened (see Matthew 24:12).

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Spiritual Free Agency

Professional sports has popularized the term “free agency.” It is a contractual concept by which a professional athlete, after serving, playing or performing under contract for a certain number of years, becomes free to negotiate a new contract with any other team. When that time expires, he is a “free agent.” He no longer “belongs” to the team with which he originally signed.

Though it is very financially rewarding to the players, this concept is playing a major role in destroying fan loyalty. Players, especially the very good ones, are becoming little more than “hired guns” who give their talents to the highest bidder. They move from team to team, wherever they feel it will be most lucrative for them to play. Free agency is exposing the public to the greed that lies at the foundation of each player’s heart and is turning people off by the thousands. Fan loyalty to a team is being overcome by disgust.

The same negative force is at work in the church in the wake of the doctrinal changes. Many in the ministry are considered to be little more than hirelings to whom a paycheck, severance pay or retirement income and benefits mean more than the truth of God and the spiritual health of the sheep. Many of the sheep feel abandoned and unprotected.

This distrust of the ministry is producing a fairly large number of “independent” Christians. These people will not join with any group. They are going to float and/or just “go it alone” because, they say, their Sabbaths are so much better now that they are free to pursue their own studies and teach their own families. They are relieved that they do not have

to put up with all the hassles in the congregation or listen to another boring sermon. Besides all this, they distrust the church government and/or do not care for the policies. I have observed all of these expressions of independence uttered or written more than I care to hear or see.

This approach may very well destroy them! In them, the principle that the church is a “spiritual organism” is stretched to its very limit! In this extreme approach, there can be no such thing as an “independent” Christian once he is made part of Christ’s body when he receives the Holy Spirit. The spiritual body is one though it has many members (I Corinthians 12:20).

The independents like to give the appearance of being wise and strong—strong enough to stand alone and be independent, to be real leaders. But, in reality, they are just as devastated as anybody. In fact, they might be among the most devastated; their attitude and corresponding reaction are exposing their underlying problems. These problems reveal themselves in ungodly attitudes—like rebellion, criticism and apathy—as well as in doctrinal disagreements.

The Real Work of God

Genesis 1:26 expresses the specific purpose statement of the Bible. God, the Creator, the Master Potter, is reproducing Himself! This is **THE** work of God. He is in the process of making man in His image. That project is completed in two stages, the physical and the spiritual. When the physical aspect was completed at creation, the spiritual one began. This is the overall project He is supervising.

God is already a unit: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). God is one, but consists of more than one Person. When Jesus came, He proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of God. In doing this, He publicly announced the expansion of this unit to include others besides the two Beings already revealed.

A kingdom is synonymous with a nation. It consists of large numbers of people, but it, too, is one. Indeed, the church is called “a holy nation” in I Peter 2:9, and though it has many members worldwide, it is one church. Thus, Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God will consist of many more personalities. He also told us how we can become a part of it and how it will be accomplished.

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Through these means, the project stated in Genesis 1:26 will take a giant step toward fulfillment.

In John 17:11, 22, Jesus adds another factor that further confirms our

understanding of what is happening in God's work. He requests of the Father that "they [the disciples, including us] may be one as [in the same way] We are." The Father and Son are obviously two different personalities, yet they are also a unit that Jesus requests others to be joined with.

How can a person, independent from consistent fellowship with the body of Christ, the church, still be a part of it? A person thinking this way is sliding away from God's intention, as His Word clearly shows. He fully intends we be an active member of a physical body as well as the spiritual organism. Is the church *only* a spiritual organism? If the spiritual organism is the only important aspect, why even have congregations? Is it possible that congregations play a major role in preparing us for God's Kingdom?

Let's look at this from another angle. God intends mankind to be an active and contributing part of a physical community. "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.' . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 24).

Perhaps verse 18 could be rephrased as, "It is not good that man be independent." Our God establishes principles and patterns in His Word from which we can extract wisdom, the practical application of truth. Some of the most basic and fundamental patterns for His purpose are established very early in Genesis.

What is He showing here? That, in relation to God's purpose, the most and the best will *not* be produced in us if we are alone. If we are independent, we remove ourselves from the circumstances that will produce the most toward His purpose. In this specific context, God is not commanding everyone to marry, but He is clearly showing that marriage is *generally* better than remaining single.

Everyone understands from his own experiences that the more people who comprise a unit or community, the greater the number and intensity of problems. This occurs largely because our carnality drives us to compete rather than cooperate. Sometimes a person desires so strongly to be independent of this kind of community relationship that he separates himself in order to be completely free from the suspicions, distrust, offenses and other hardships that occur within a group. To put it another way, it is similar to a soldier running away from the battlefield to protect himself.

In its rawest form, it is selfishness and self-interest. It can be a self-serving avoidance of being useful, of contributing steadfast strength and encouragement, of being a right example to others or of being found wrong and corrected. If nothing else, we are detaching ourselves from the unit to which God intends we show allegiance and give service.

A Lesson from History

Daniel 8:5-7 gives a historical insight that is helpful in this regard:

And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.

God's description of Greece, their army and the manner in which they fought is instructive. Greece's army was invincible in its time. Nobody ever fought with such lightning ferocity and cunning before this time or perhaps since. They created *blitzkrieg* warfare, which Adolf Hitler openly admitted that he copied from the ancient Greeks.

One historian speculated that the ferocity of the Greek army was produced by their approach to life, especially in politics. Even though their system had people filling governing offices such as mayor or burgess, they did not have a representative system like ours. Their society was nearly a pure democracy. Each Greek male was taught that *he* was responsible to participate and contribute to governing the community. One result of this was that individual citizens felt responsible to the community, and leadership qualities were produced in them that made each Greek male feel as though he was the leader of his community even though he really was not.

These qualities carried through into their warfare. The individual soldier not only took orders from his captain, he also thought independently to act for the benefit of the regiment. This frequently became necessary in the heat of battle when the leader was incapacitated by wounds or other distractions. Another quickly assumed his role, and there was no loss of leadership.

Thus, a factor that made the Greek fighting machine so invincible was that when their "shepherd" was smitten, the "sheep" did not scatter. The individual Greek soldier would not run off to protect himself from the confusion and danger of the battle when his commander fell. Instead, he helped his unit regroup because he was responsibly committed to its well-being and the accomplishment of its goals rather than his personal welfare.

There *are* times when it is necessary to flee or withdraw for a while. Jesus said to flee persecution (Matthew 10:23). It is obvious that, on occasion, discretion is the better part of valor. But such times should be ONLY A BRIEF INTERVAL during the time of God's working with a person or with His church.

On the other hand, I would not want people to "jump" just anywhere to be with a group. There are equally dangerous ramifications of being

with the *wrong* group. We should very thoroughly and prayerfully consider where we will fellowship.

The Church Scattered

The church is under attack. A powerful persecution is under way, and many sheep have been scattered. But what I am hearing from “independents” are cries such as, “I’ll never follow another man!” or “No man is going to tell me what to do!” or “Beware of any group that has a hierarchical governmental structure.”

While a limited amount of wisdom may be in such thinking, these independents may be failing to see a very real problem because they are looking in only one direction. While they critically examine others, problems of equal or greater magnitude in the areas of ignorance of God’s Word, of respect for government or gross intolerance for another’s weaknesses may be in them.

They have reacted by divorcing themselves from any group and “floating” among many groups. Their attitude is such that, even when they do attend, they are in reality just passing through. It is very much like the modern practice of a man and woman living together without commitment. Each “takes” what they can get from the relationship, but one is always free to leave if things do not go quite as planned.

Daniel writes:

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered [*scattered*, KJV], all these things shall be finished. (Daniel 12:7)

Surely the enemy has attacked, and the sheep are scattered! Jesus says,

And when he [the true shepherd] brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:4-5)

We had good reason to flee our former association: The voice of a stranger was heard within it, and we could not follow him. But is it pos-

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sible that the “independents” still do not hear the True Shepherd’s voice? Could they have fled for different reasons? This is why these people may be in very real danger. They cannot come to *any* shepherd because their confusion and governmental problems are preventing it.

Shepherds of God’s Flock

The apostle Peter called Jesus “the Chief Shepherd” (I Peter 5:4). But this same Peter also admonished earth-bound men, elders of the church, to be shepherds to the church of God:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God** which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (I Peter 5:1-3)

Many of the independents maintain the notion that they are going to follow only Christ. The unspoken (and sometimes spoken) charge is that there is no need for the ministry. If that is so, why then does God consider scattered sheep as *not* being in a fold? Notice Jeremiah 23:1-4:

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,” says the LORD. “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them *back to their folds*; and they shall be fruitful and increase. *I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them*; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the LORD.

This same principle is expressed in Ezekiel 34.

The independents are scattered, but they think they are in the fold. If their premise is correct, then why all the instruction in the Bible about gathering those who are scattered? The Bible gives the impression that a person is not in the fold unless he is with the group. Why else did Jesus give the parable of leaving the ninety-nine sheep to rescue the one not with the flock? It is interesting that Jesus depicted the separated sheep in His parable in Matthew 18:12-14 as having gone astray, and in Luke 15:4-7 as being lost.

Jesus has set certain men in His church as shepherds to tend His flock under Him. They are described in Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 as His gift

to the church. In giving this gift to the church, He in turn gave gifts to them to enable them to perform their job. Like all others, some perform their appointed tasks faithfully (Matthew 25:21, 23), while others are unjust stewards of their responsibilities (Acts 20:30).

To whom much is given, much is required, and so the minister will have to answer for his use of those gifts. James makes it very clear that the teacher will receive the stricter judgment (James 3:1). But the independent has a strong proclivity to paint all with one brush, perhaps forgetting that he also will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for his use of his gifts and for his possibly too critical judgments of others.

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The Need for Human Leadership

What is the independent looking for? Is he looking for a pastor completely unstained by any hint of defect in character or expression of personality? Where will he find him? Is he looking for a leader with absolutely perfect doctrine? What is it? Is he looking for a teacher who has an exquisite ability to express the teaching with clarity and beauty? Is he looking for the fruits of that person's ministry? I think a person should look for these things. It would be wonderful to find such a person, but at the same time we must realize that finding all of them in perfection in one man will be very difficult, if not impossible. Especially in this difficult time, one should not make his search with the attitude that he will settle down and take root only when he finds a pastor who deserves to have him in the congregation!

God makes it very clear that other shepherds besides Christ are necessary for leading and caring for His people. Zechariah 10:2 says, "For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd." The context makes it plain that God is speaking of human leaders.

Moses understood the need for human leadership even though Israel had the cloud to follow in the wilderness. The context shows God's clear assent to Moses' proposal.

Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD

may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient” (Numbers 27:15-20).

Making a diligent and honest search for a true shepherd of the church of God is everyone’s responsibility. It is imperative that we find a fold where we can be properly fed and where we can serve. The enemy has scattered the flock through the extensive doctrinal changes, and God has permitted it for our good.

God does nothing that is not for our good. Undoubtedly, a sorting of His people is taking place through the choices we make about which group we choose to fellowship with. In the broadest sense, this situation is enabling Him to evaluate who really loves truth (II Thessalonians 2:10). Perhaps the sorting will permit Him to work with us to an even greater extent.

At any rate, it is a daunting challenge for all of us to make clear sense of what is going on and where all this is headed in the immediate future. One thing is certain: Romans 8:28 is still in the Bible, and only good can develop from this for those who truly love God. He is still on His throne. But remember, it is not God’s will that we be separate from a group. Lone sheep are the ones most easily “picked off” by the predators prowling along the perimeter of the flock. Safety, service, love and strength is within the fold.

Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [*hell*, KJV; the grave] shall not prevail against it.” These very words of Christ clearly show He had a corporate body of humans in mind, not just a spiritual organism. He uses *ekklesia*, meaning an assembly of people, a group, and He confirms this by using *Hades*, a pit into which dead bodies are cast. He thus shows His church to exist continuously as flesh-and-blood human beings.

It is clearly His will that all those having the Spirit of God be fellowshiping and serving together on a regular basis (Hebrews 10:25). A person may delude himself into thinking he can better serve Christ and prepare for the Kingdom of God free from all the pressures of a congregation, but the Word of God shows otherwise. He could even be condemning himself to the Lake of Fire by showing God that he is not pleased to associate with God’s own sons and daughters, His holy people. The “independent” must repent of his independence if he wants to glorify God, truly serve His people and become spiritually mature.

Do We Need Teachers?

In the last few years, turmoil and confusion have run amok in the church of God. Many feel they were misled by individuals who taught them doctrines they later came to understand were untrue. Some have yielded to the tendency to become cynical and suspicious of nearly anyone who claims to be a teacher of God's Word.

As the church has broken up into smaller groups, some have decided that they do not need anyone to teach them. Believing themselves to be self-sufficient and capable of learning God's truth on their own, they have ceased being active in *any* church organization. Many do not attend Sabbath services with anyone anymore.

Some of these "independents" use I John 2:27 to support their claim of not needing a teacher: "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and *you do not need that anyone teach you*; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." From this scripture, they take the position that Christians do not need teachers at all; anyone with the Holy Spirit can get along fine all by himself.

What about this? Do Christians need teachers? Is it important to have ministers, elders, deacons and other leaders to give sermons and sermonettes and expound the Word of God? Is it important to have brethren with whom we can fellowship and share our spiritual lives? Or can we just stay at home on the Sabbath and read our Bibles and do just fine? Is that what the apostle John is saying in this verse? If not, what is he saying?

Problems in the Church

To understand what John says in this scripture, we must view his words from the context of his epistle and understand the major problems

extant in the church when he wrote it. John wrote his letters near the end of the first century AD. The church was being subjected to an unprecedented onslaught of heretical teachings, one of which was Gnosticism.

A major tenet of Gnosticism was that everything material was evil. As some of the Gnostics found their way into God's church and began to believe in Christ, they tried to reconcile this Gnostic concept with the fact that Jesus Christ was a human being and yet very God. Not wanting to abandon their philosophical view that all matter was evil, they developed a heretical view of Christ's nature and began teaching that He had not been a physical, flesh-and-blood human being.

From these roots sprang a heretical doctrine called Docetism. A number of schools of thought existed among the Docetists regarding the nature of Christ.

The more thoroughgoing Docetae assumed the position that Christ was born without any participation of matter; and that all the acts and sufferings of His human life, including the crucifixion, were only apparent. . . . The other, or milder school of Docetae, attributed to Christ an ethereal and heavenly instead of a truly human body. (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, vol. VIII, p. 353)

Another point of view was that Jesus was a man, but Christ was a heavenly being. In its comment on I John 2:22, *The Interpreter's Bible* comments:

The Docetists made a separation between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Christ. There were various theories about the Christ or the Son of God in his relationship to Jesus, and the elder [John] no doubt repudiates more than one kind as he appeals to the early Christian confessions of faith. (Vol. 12, pp. 246-247)

With this background in mind, we can better understand what was on John's mind when he wrote his epistles. He wastes no time getting into his subject, for in the very first verse of I John, he immediately repudiates the Docetist heresy: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life" (I John 1:1). As a witness to Jesus Christ's entire ministry, John shows how He was not an apparition or a phantom. The apostles had heard His voice with their ears, seen Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands. He is writing to leave no doubt that Jesus Christ was a physical human being but at the same time the very Word of God.

In chapter 2, John begins discussing this Docetist heresy that had crept into the church and apparently affected many members.

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (I John 2:18-19)

John calls the various individuals who were teaching heresy “antichrists.” At one time, these people had fellowshipped with true believers but then had left the church and were now trying to draw others away to follow their heretical teachings. John points out that they were never really converted, or they would have stayed with the body of true believers.

John makes it clear in verses 20-21 that his audience is composed of deeply converted people who have God’s Holy Spirit and are rooted and grounded in the truth.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.”

The “anointing” is the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we can see from II Corinthians 1:21-22: “Now He who establishes us with you in

Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit.” John’s phrase, “you know all things,” simply refers to the fact that these people knew and understood the basic doctrines of the church.

In I John 2:22-23, John addresses the lies that the Docetists were teaching:

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

The denial “that Jesus is the Christ” does not imply that the Docetists thought Jesus was not the Messiah. Rather, the Docetists claimed that Jesus—the Man whom John had heard, seen and touched—was not truly God in the flesh and that the true Christ was an ethereal being in heaven. John argues that such a teaching denies the family relationship of the Father and the Son, obscuring the true nature of God.

Furthermore, John writes, anyone who denies that Jesus was God in

The members of the church of God in John’s day knew and understood the basic doctrines of the church.

the flesh, subject to temptation just like all human beings, “does not have the Father either.” Such a person simply does not understand the gospel message that we have the opportunity to become members of the God Family (I John 3:1-2). Jesus says, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). If we distort the image of Jesus Christ and who He was, we end up altering our concept of the Father also.

John then appeals to the brethren to hold fast to the truth that they had been taught since their calling. “Therefore let that abide in you which

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you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (I John 2:24). To “abide” in the Son and the Father means to remain faithful to God’s way of life, grow spiritually and become more and more like God (John 15:4-6). The only way we can do this is by remaining faithful to the truth of God that the apostles taught from the church’s

founding. To those who remain faithful to His way, God has promised eternal life (I John 2:25).

Verse 26 functions as a specific purpose statement for the whole epistle: “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.” In this pivotal verse, John explains his purpose for writing this letter: to warn true believers about these false teachers who were trying to draw them away from the truth. If they allow themselves to be deceived about the nature of Christ and the God Family, John writes, it could cost them their eternal life!

No Need for *False Teachers*

Now we can more clearly understand what John means in verse 27: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you.” Clearly, he is **not** saying that these people had no need for someone to teach them the difference between truth and error. They did need it! That is why John wrote his epistle! What they did not need was for anyone to teach them the church’s basic doctrines, nor did they need human logic or philosophy to help them understand God’s nature.

John had known, seen, heard and touched Jesus Christ personally. Christ had taught him intensively for three-and-a-half years, and in turn, the aged apostle had taught them the same truth throughout his own ministry. The members of God’s church had no need for any heretic to teach them.

As true sons of God, they had received His Holy Spirit, which had opened their minds and led them into the truth (John 16:13). They had been thoroughly grounded in the truth regarding the nature of Christ and God and the very purpose of life itself. God's truth had not changed, so what need did they have to relearn it?

In the rest of I John 2:27, John encourages them to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them and keep them faithful to what they had been taught from the beginning. Their original knowledge was true and no lie: "But as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him."

The apostle repeats this thought and warning later in the epistle:

And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (I John 3:24–4:3)

A Modern Analogy

An analogy from our own times may help us to understand better what John means in these scriptures. While Herbert W. Armstrong was alive, we were thoroughly grounded in the truth that God is a Family. We knew that the Father and the Son are two separate personalities but are one just as a family is one unit. The church had thoroughly studied the scriptures on this doctrine and could easily prove it from the Bible to those who had God's Spirit.

However, recently some have tried to teach another doctrine regarding the nature of God, causing considerable controversy within the church. The "new" doctrine is not based on God's Word but on human logic and reasoning. It cannot be proven from the Bible!

If we were to write a letter to those who were struggling with this doctrine, we would undoubtedly mention some of the same things that John writes in his epistle:

- We would encourage them to remain faithful to the truths God revealed through His apostles (I John 2:24).
- We would warn them that the new doctrine is a lie and not based on the truth of the Bible (verses 21, 27).
- We would emphasize that the new teaching threatens their eternal life because it gives them a distorted picture of the nature of God and obscures the very purpose of life itself (verses 22-23, 25).

- We would exhort them to use the Holy Spirit to lead them in prayerfully studying the Scriptures and to base their belief on those things written there. They should not allow anyone to teach them something new based on some other approach (verses 20, 26-27).
- We would remind them that they had been thoroughly grounded in that doctrine years ago by a man God used mightily to restore many biblical truths (verses 24, 27).

Why We Need Teachers

Do we need teachers? Of course! John's epistle is an excellent example of why teachers are needed in the church. When false doctrine threatened members of the true body of believers, John found it necessary to spell out to them the dangers in it, even though the brethren had been thoroughly grounded in the truth. To reassure them that their foundational beliefs were true, he felt he needed to explain the truth to them again. He also saw that they could use some encouragement to trust the Holy Spirit to lead them into the truth.

This is exactly what a true minister of God is to do! The author of Hebrews instructs us to respect the ministry because they are given to us to protect us. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17).

Many New Testament examples show us our need for teachers. Philip's experience with the Ethiopian eunuch clearly illustrates how we need experienced and educated teachers to explain and expound the Word of God (Acts 8:26-38). As Philip approaches him, the eunuch is reading an Old Testament prophecy that foretold Christ's sufferings. When asked if he understands the passage, the eunuch has the humility to admit he needs help. He replies, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (verse 31). Philip then explains to him how this prophecy was fulfilled in the suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth. This results in the eunuch's baptism (verse 38).

In dealing with the many problems in the Corinthian church, Paul had to send Timothy to refresh them in the truth that Paul had preached.

Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. (I Corinthians 4:16-17)

In his letters to Timothy, Paul instructs the young evangelist about various principles that he should teach the people. "These things command and teach. . . . Teach and exhort these things" (I Timothy 4:11; 6:2).

In addition, the apostle tells him to train others to be teachers. "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit

these to faithful men who will be able to teach others, also” (II Timothy 2:2). Besides this, an elder must be “able to teach” (I Timothy 3:2). The very purpose of the ministry is to help in perfecting the saints (Ephesians 4:11-12, KJV).

Throughout the New Testament, God continually emphasizes the need to provide spiritual food to the church. Jesus says that His servants will be providing “food in due season” to His people (Matthew 24:45). “Feed My sheep” is one of the last things Jesus tells Peter (John 21:17). Paul writes to Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (II Timothy 4:2).

In teaching the Corinthians the basic doctrines, Paul refers to his instruction as milk: “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able” (I Corinthians 3:2). The author of Hebrews uses

a similar analogy when the brethren needed to relearn God’s truth: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Hebrews 5:12).

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Christians Need Fellowship

The New Testament also stresses that Christians need the fellowship of others of like mind. An identifying mark of the true church is that the members have love for one another (John 13:35). Indeed, one of the criteria by which Christ will judge us is how we treat our brethren in the church (Matthew 25:31-46). How can we love and serve one another if we do not fellowship with and get to know each other?

God has given us ample instruction regarding how we should relate to other Christians. It is His purpose to teach us how to get along with each other so we can teach others about these things in the Millennium. We are to be unselfish and concerned for the needs of others (Philippians 2:4). God wants us to learn patience and forgiveness (Colossians 3:13), striving to be “kindly affectionate,” humble and self-effacing in our dealings with one another (Romans 12:10). We should be giving and hospitable to our brethren (verse 13).

The New Testament is replete with various admonitions on how we should interact with our brothers and sisters in the church. Obviously, God views our interaction with other Christians as vital to our training to become members of the God Family and qualifying for a position in His

Kingdom. He wants us to develop interpersonal skills that equip us to deal with occasional differences of opinion and offenses.

Further, God directly forbids us to stop fellowshiping with other Christians:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, *and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Our fellowship should be a source of encouragement to one another. We should use this time to show love to our brethren and to motivate them to perform acts of kindness and service for others.

All of these exhortations show a clear need for us to be part of an organization of God's people. God's Sabbath service is like a weekly training school for Christians. The spiritual food that God's true ministers prepare for us is vitally important for our spiritual growth and development. In discussing the relationship of the ministry to the church member, Paul explains that the ministry is given

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13)

The interaction that we have with one another when we fellowship at church services helps us to develop the fruit of God's Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul shows that the church is truly Christ's body, and like the human body, each part depends upon the other parts.

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. (I Corinthians 12:20-22)

This apostle also illustrates how we must all work interdependently to help each other: "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (I Corinthians 12:26). In Ephesians 4:15-16, he describes how the various members of the body of Christ work together in a synergistic manner to bring about growth that would not otherwise be possible.

. . . but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into

Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Why deny ourselves all these benefits? If we do, we are losing out on tremendous opportunities for companionship, help and growth!

Do Not Become Vulnerable

Yes, we need teachers! We need each other!

The New Testament clearly shows us that God desires us to have teachers, to partake of spiritual food on a weekly basis in Sabbath services and to interact with others of like mind who have God's Holy Spirit. If we willfully abstain from participating in an organization of true believers, we are wasting many God-given opportunities for developing our character, growing in understanding and coming to know other children of God.

In addition, we place ourselves in a vulnerable, dangerous position. Peter describes Satan as “walk[ing] about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8). The animal kingdom teaches us that predators like lions usually look for and attack the animals that are alone and have wandered away from the flock. Such strays are in an exposed position because they lack the protection afforded by the large numbers of others of like kind. Our adversary likes nothing better than pouncing on sheep who try to “go it alone.”

We do not have to be so vulnerable! The protection of the flock is available. Our place and our protection are found in worshipping and fellowshiping with the people of God in “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

I Love Government!

It seems people despise, resent and complain about government most of the time. Perhaps it is because most governments try to fool most of the people most of the time. But we also need to address another key reason.

Consider a child whose brain tells him he should walk like an adult. His brain orders his hands to turn loose of the chair and commands his feet and legs to march to Daddy. The hands reluctantly respond, but the feet and legs respond even more so and land him on his diaper or head. This frustrates and frightens the brain, which immediately sends an urgent message to the body parts with which it has already developed a strong working relationship. Lots of noise and tears result. This process repeats until the extremities all mature sufficiently to carry out their orders. Parents fret until the brain-body coordination of the child is mature enough to lay their concerns about injuries to rest.

For a few years the child is fairly coordinated. Once rapid growth begins at age eleven or twelve, another period ensues when the brain and feet are on different wavelengths. Opposing seventh-grade football teams need not always tackle each other, as they often self-destruct over their own feet!

Ah, now the teen years begin! Choir directors fret over boys who sing tenor and bass on the same note. The voice box does not clearly discern who is in charge, boy or man! Hormonal development and suffusion create confusion between the brain and its servants, the eyes, ears, nose and hands.

Even in adulthood, the mind has certain ideals and goals it desires to attain. The rest of the body parts tug in different directions, confusing the mind. Just like the baby landing on his diaper, we find ourselves on our rear ends—suffering from addictions, divorces and career failures.

By the time we should have it together, if ever, the ravages of aging intrude. Eyes, ears, arms and legs wear out and refuse to obey instructions from the brain efficiently. The brain itself can begin to short-circuit, causing memory lapses and feeble direction to other worn body parts. Again, we land on our behinds—this time with broken hips. Ultimately, feeble signals from the brain and feeble responses from the body render our parts totally governmentless. We die.

Why We Should Love Government

I love government. I love it when my mind and body respond to lofty, worthy ideals and coordinate splendidly in attaining them!

I am so thankful God put my brain in charge of the rest of my body. It is bad enough when my mind wanders, but what if my feet wandered independently? I would walk in circles or do the splits!

What about my tongue? Some have accused me at times of allowing it to waggle independent of my brain. Trouble every time! With perfect government of that organ, I would be perfect (James 3:2).

On a morning not long ago, I wandered into the kitchen under the illusion I was wide awake and in control, only to discover my recalcitrant hand placing an *empty* coffee cup in the microwave! My brain was not yet sending clear signals to my partially independent body parts. Pity the other drivers had I started my morning commute at that point!

With weak, indecisive government, I am “living-impaired.” Totally governmentless, I am dead. Therefore, I love government.

So far, so good.

The child, the teen, the adult, the aged—all desperately seek total control of all their functions. Basketball star Shaquille O’Neal still desperately wishes he could govern all his parts sufficiently to make a free throw consistently.

Since strong central government, as discussed thus far, is so good, where does the rub come? Why do people despise and resent government?

The baby wants his brain to tell his feet what to do. The key word is “*his*.” *His* brain, *his* feet. Daddy’s or Mommy’s brain and tongue will not do. He wants *his* brain to tell *his* feet where to go and when. He does not want Daddy or Mommy to enter the equation. He certainly does not want their hand, from behind and about a foot off the ground, to enter into it.

This, simply stated, is the problem humans have with government. With parents. With school teachers. With city, county, state, federal or international governments. With church governments. With God Himself. Or even with ourselves when our consciences seek to overrule the desires of the flesh.

By nature, we do not want **ANYONE** other than our own mind and emotions telling us what to do! As a concept, I love government. You love government. That is, if we can convince ourselves we are responding to *self-government!*

When *our very own consciences* trouble us, our brains and other parts tend to rebel. As the chicken commercial went, “Pieces is pieces and parts is parts.” No part wants to be told what to do by any other part. A chicken consists of parts, but a pile of parts is not a chicken. A chicken can cackle and lay eggs. A pile of chicken parts can do nothing—except rot.

My body, fully assembled and coordinated, can accomplish goals if all the parts obey the brain. Dismembered, my parts *cannot* respond and produce worthwhile tasks. They become worthless to the body.

Perhaps this sounds simplistic—throughout I Corinthians 12, Paul uses the same “simplistic” analogy of the body to explain God and government—yet few would disagree with the concepts offered so far. *We do cherish government on some level.*

What About the Church?

Though all hands may agree so far, raising the church issue will cause emotional responses about where this is headed. In other words, is he about to write something with which I will disagree?

Resistance comes easily. *The real key is to internalize the concepts of government to the point they are an integral part of us.* That stops the resistance. Once we understand and accept the mind of Christ to the point that “this mind [is] in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5), *governing ourselves* according to His instructions becomes easier.

The world tends to reject any governmental direction from God. As disciples who have converted to or internalized God and His laws as “our” way—or more accurately, made ourselves part of *His* way—we begin to respond to Him. The point is, we are becoming at one with Him and therefore rebel less as we grow into oneness.

His government is one thing. *Church* government is a horse of a different color! There is a definite difference between the government of God *by* God and a church government of men learning to govern as God Himself governs. No two men will do it exactly as Christ would. There are different administrations (I Corinthians 12:5, KJV). God accepts this as long as the leaders do not compromise the principles of His law.

The key to success is the same as with God governing directly. Find the correct form of church government—and those who are correctly applying it—and internalize it. Make it part of *your* thinking, and the rebellion against it as an outside force will quickly diminish.

Is an Ordained Ministry Really Necessary?

The greater church of God is wrestling with governmental issues:

- Was apostolic authority given only to the original twelve, making a hierarchical ministry unnecessary today?

- Is someone an “elder” just because he is older?
- Should we all be teachers?
- Does Matthew 18:20 give permission for as few as two or three to gather and call themselves a church?
- Can we successfully look to Christ as our “personal Shepherd” and repudiate any other leadership, thereby forming a church of one?

All these questions plague the greater church of God today. Why is there a problem? How did it develop? What is the solution?

Galatians 4:26 and 6:16 show Jerusalem and Israel can be spiritually defined and addressed apart from physical Israel. Thus, when Ezekiel 34 speaks about “the shepherds of Israel,” the prophecy can apply to the ministry of God’s church.

Ezekiel condemns the ministry as a whole for being more concerned for self and paycheck than for the “sheep,” the members of the church. Rather than helping, healing and leading, government was often administered with force and cruelty. Talking the talk was followed far more frequently than walking the walk. God also charges them with defiling the doctrine, which verse 18 pictures as trodden pasture and fouled water. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude all warn about “wolves” entering at the end, rending the flock and introducing another gospel.

***God Himself is very
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Is it any wonder respect for the ministry is at low ebb? God Himself is very upset with shepherds who cared more for themselves than for the sheep. Through misuse and abuse, wolves in sheep’s clothing ripped and tore the sheep. God *and* man deplore and reject such a ministry. The ministry today is in sad disarray, distrusted and despised by many. Some ministers are reckoned as hirelings who cared not for the sheep but only for their paychecks. These men would compromise the truth, even teach what they knew was wrong, to retain their salaries.

Zechariah 11:3 describes a forsaken ministry, howling over the loss of their flocks, which they mistreated. I cringe to write this, having been many years in the ministry. However, it is true, and I have to analyze how much and in what ways I contributed to the problem, then approach God to “confess and forsake” those sins (Proverbs 28:13).

Screaming for “respect for the ministry” will not help. These hurts can only be healed by proper example and time, combined with a forgiving heart, established by God, in those who have been harmed.

Because of these abuses, insidious Laodiceanism and our natural

proclivity to resent any government except our own, we have a church despised and *blown apart by God Himself*. (Read all of Lamentations, Ezekiel 22:25-29 and 24:21 to confirm who is behind the separation.)

Hierarchy

Wolves have scattered the sheep into groups of one to ten to hundreds. A few groups of a few thousand have remained. Because people tend to seek justification for whatever position they find themselves in, this scattering has spawned questions and theories about the need for a ministry, an issue seldom considered before Herbert Armstrong's death.

Is a hierarchical church government biblical? Is it still needed in view of the break up of the Worldwide Church of God? Can people survive and be saved on their own? Where is this situation headed? Where is *God* in all this?

At one time in our parent church, we all looked to one leader. Herbert Armstrong often said God works through only one administration, one man, at a time. Today, the whole argument against this is based on the premise: "We all have the Holy Spirit. God guides us personally. Ordination is meaningless. I can teach though no one has laid hands on me. We do not need ministers."

A look at Israel's history shows the same scenario. Through Moses came great deliverance. Under him, Israel was unified both in purpose and politically. As to leadership, God clearly established that Moses was *THE* man. Korah and his cohorts challenged this, saying to Moses and Aaron:

You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? . . . Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? (Numbers 16:3, 13)

There is not a whit of difference in meaning between the statements of today's independents and Korah! While condemning Moses as hierarchical, they forgot they also had positions in that hierarchy. They were *part of* what they were condemning! Notice how Moses replies to them:

Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? (verses 9-10)

Moses lays it right back on them! They had been appointed apart from the rest of the congregation just as he had been. They despised and took lightly *that* appointment, desiring the higher job! *They did not despise hierarchy—they despised not being HIGHER in that hierarchy!* They wanted to call the shots their way.

The same is true today. Even in those groups condemning organized government, someone emerges as spokesman, organizer and/or leader. Those who disagree with this then split off again. The process tends to continue until little or nothing remains. Are these fruits godly?

“All the People Are Holy”

Did the truths we hold dear come from scholarship or the revelation of God? Herbert Armstrong was no Hebrew or Greek scholar. God taught him a little at a time over many years. He kept the holy days for many years before understanding how they depict the plan of salvation for all of mankind. As far as we know, no scholar, *individual Christian* or any church group ever understood God’s plan of salvation just by studying the Bible.

Yet God’s plan is crystal clear to us now that it has been revealed through God’s servant and explained by him. Though we *are* holy, God shows throughout the Bible that He appoints and anoints specific leaders. He reveals His Word through them, and they preach and teach it to the people.

“All the people are holy”—and therefore their opinions are just as good as anyone else’s—is a dangerous position to take! Why?

At God’s direction, the earth swallowed up Korah and his followers, yet on the very next day, the people accused Moses and Aaron of killing them (verse 41). They said, “You have killed the people of the LORD.” God was so angry at their missing the point that He intended to kill *all of them!* At Moses’ intercession, only 14,700 died. Was their position dangerous or what? This sounds similar to Psalm 12:4: “Who have said, ‘With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?’”

Every man leaning to his own understanding is divisive. In the real world, without a leader, a group can do little or nothing positive. Even our lauded “democratic” society throws democracy to the wind in military training and war. How many battles could be won if everyone made individual decisions on when, where, why, who and how he would fight? A smaller force united under one leader would quickly defeat a hundred armies of two or three.

We understand this on a practical basis, but cannot seem to translate it to God’s army. Did the church accomplish a powerful work while it was united under one leader, Herbert W. Armstrong? Did *The Plain Truth* circulation reach over six million? Did the TV and radio programs blanket the earth? Did a successful college program train helpers for that

work? Compare this to what has happened since Worldwide shattered into hundreds of smaller groups and individual pieces.

Central Government

The time of the Judges is not a stellar clip in Israel's highlight film. God's evaluation of it closes the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Verse 24 shows each man did "his own thing." When God is displeased, as He was then, He often sends famines (Ruth 1:1), and a spiritual famine is what we are experiencing now (Amos 8:11).

Contrast the fruits of when the people appoint a leader (Saul) and when God appoints a leader (David). Saul's reign was tumultuous and his dynasty short lived. Under David, despite his personal problems, Israel enjoyed long-term unity and prosperity. Even with a revolving door of good and evil kings, Israel and Judah fared better with central leadership than without.

In the early years, Herbert Armstrong did not understand the necessity of hierarchical central government. Only as his efforts at building local groups fell apart did he discern a need for a trained ministry. This need so impressed him that he founded a college for the express purpose of training ministers. It flourished under God's obvious blessing, and it became a globe-girdling organization. A few Korahs appeared and dis-

appeared, and the subsequent plagues spiritually killed and maimed thousands of sheep. After Mr. Armstrong's death, wolves ravaged the flock.

Is there any hope for us today? Is spiritual Israel as Ezekiel describes? "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" (Ezekiel 37:11). What are the fruits of this

present every-man-for-himself situation? Are we accomplishing a great work? What a pity that an organization, blessed under one man to accomplish a great work, has been torn in pieces that of themselves can do very little if anything. Yet each piece thinks it "holy unto itself."

They have forgotten—or ignore—that God actually commands us to follow men! Paul writes, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1). Hebrews 13:7 says of the ministry, "whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." I Corinthians 4:16, Philippians 3:17 and II Thessalonians 3:7-9 give similar admonitions.

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The Body Analogy

We need to compare our situation with the New Testament, the place where today's "spiritual democrats" scamper to justify themselves. Here, they claim, are proofs for spiritually flying solo with Christ as their personal teacher, or considering a church to be "where two or three are gathered together in My name" (Matthew 18:20).

Christ unarguably established a hierarchy with the twelve apostles. Some contend that it did not extend below them or succeed them for future administrations. Did Christ appoint only apostles in the church? No, I Corinthians 12:18, 28-30 and Ephesians 4:11-16 show that God has set many different offices and people in them as **HE** chooses. These scriptures describe an obvious chain of authority within the church to prepare its members for God's Kingdom.

Paul uses the "body" analogy with Christ as "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). He explains that Christians "are the body of Christ, and members individually" (I Corinthians 12:27). Can we claim to stand individually, apart from the body? What happens if a body part is dismembered? It rots. It can do nothing unless connected to the body (verse 21). In other words, it is useless. The smallest or weaker parts are also necessary (verse 22), but they also are of no value and useless unless attached. There is to be no division or schism between body parts (verse 25).

The body will ultimately go into the Kingdom. It may be missing some offending parts (Matthew 18:7-10). Jesus uses the analogy to show that all members may not make it, but He will not marry a bride with missing parts. He will heal the body, restoring its parts or replacing them with new ones to make it whole again. Using a different metaphor, Romans 11 explains a grafting process to restore the entire tree if the natural branches are cut off.

Teachers and Elders

Do we qualify as teachers just because we are long-time members of the church and know enough to teach others (Hebrews 5:12)? Even so, should all be teachers? James warns, "My brethren, *let not many of you become teachers*, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

Does one qualify as an elder simply by being chronologically the oldest in a given group? "Old" is not a qualification of the ministry, as Paul says in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The oldest man in the congregation may not have ANY of these spiritual qualifications; he may indeed be an old fool! Conversely, he may be a nice guy and truly converted but have no ability or inclination to teach. Also, many old people are newly converted—true babes in Christ! Should someone serve the church if he is not a man who walks by faith as shown by his works?

In contrast, Paul exhorts Timothy not to allow his *youth* to be despised (I Timothy 4:12), though he was ordained to the ministry. He even had other ministers or elders under his supervision. Paul instructed him to pay them double if they ruled well (I Timothy 5:17). This shows both authority and remuneration—a hierarchical administration!

Several other scriptures bear on this topic:

- **Acts 14:23:** “[Paul and Barnabas] appointed [*ordained*, KJV] elders in every church.”
- **Acts 20: 28:** “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has *made* you [elders] overseers, to shepherd the church of God.”
- **Hebrews 13:7:** “Remember those who *rule over you*, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”
- **Hebrews 13:17:** “*Obey* those who *rule over you*, and *be submissive*: for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”

Dozens of other passages further clarify that the New Testament church had authority and hierarchical structure.

Studying the Greek words for *elder* and *bishop* is inconclusive, as the writers used generic words. They can be “loaded” either way. However, *context and a comparison of clear scriptures*, such as the ones cited above, give absolute proof of hierarchical administration in the New Testament age.

Family Government

God’s government is a family government. The Father sets the rules. The mother is the church (Galatians 4:26) who fulfills Proverbs 31. She, through the ministry (I Peter 5:1-4), is to clothe, feed and care for her family. She selects the food, prepares it and preaches it. God gives her leeway to administer things under Him. The children, under her direct supervision, are to follow her as she follows the Father’s instructions, only refusing if she departs from them (Acts 5:29).

The children are to be *self-governing under the Father and mother!* The mother can disfellowship—put out of the family—if the children do not heed the oversight of both Father and mother (I Corinthians 5:5; I Timothy 1:20). By their free moral agency, they choose to obey or disobey.

Even a child is known by his works (Proverbs 20:11). Children have a responsibility to mature, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), but they never have total autonomy until mature (Galatians 4:1-2). Full spiritual maturity will be reached when we are born into the Kingdom of God (I John 3:2). Until then, we are under the direct supervision of the mother.

Even afterward, we will eternally be part of a Family with hierarchical rulership from the Father through Christ, Abraham, David and others. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Why would He have hierarchy in the Old Testament, suspend it after the apostles, only to reinstitute it in the Kingdom? The problem is not whether there is government over us, but whether or not we will submit to it!

“Where Two or Three Are Gathered”

What about “where two or three are gathered together in My name” (Matthew 18:20)? Many stay-at-home members use this verse to justify not fellowshiping with a larger organization. On the surface, it seems to support their argument. However, we must look at it in context.

The chapter begins with Jesus teaching about our need for humility (verses 1-5). He uses the analogy of body parts to show the importance of not offending little ones (verses 6-10). He then gives the Parable of the Lost Sheep to show His concern for every sheep (verses 11-14). He instructs about how we should deal with offenses among us (verses 15-20). The context of the entire chapter is interpersonal relations and offenses, *not church administration*. Peter understood this, for he immediately asks how often one should forgive a brother (verse 21).

God requires two or three witnesses lest injustice come from one man’s word against another (verse 16; Deuteronomy 19:15). He will honor the decision based on the judgment of two or three along with the accuser. If the offender will not listen to them, the offense should be taken to a larger forum—the church. *The very context assumes the existence of a larger group*. God prefers, however, that matters be handled privately in a smaller group whom He will be among rather than escalating every personal problem to the attention of the whole church. Notice the instruction: Go to the offender *ALONE* first, then escalate it only as necessary to solve the problem.

In I Corinthians 5, Paul shows how this works in practical application when a church member was unabashedly committing sexual sins. Notice that Paul had ministerial, hierarchical authority over the Gentile church in Corinth. He even made his judgment of the situation—disfellowship that man!—without being present! Later, upon the man’s repentance, he ordered him restored, and forgave *even as they forgave* (II Corinthians 2:10). He also legislated what their attitude and approach to a repentant sinner should be!

Did he allow every group of two or three in the congregation to make a judgment? How would God have bound the *conflicting* judgments that surely would have arisen between the conservatives and liberals in Corinth? The church would have been divided into many small groups had Paul not exercised his authority.

Is that not what we have seen in the greater church of God as groups

have misapplied Matthew 18:20, lifting it out of context, and justifying their own doctrinal and administrative decisions? This misapplication and twisting of this one scripture automatically repudiates any authority God placed in an ordained ministry and splinters the church. Is that how Paul understood Scripture, or did he constantly defend his own position as an apostle and that of the local ordained ministry to preserve unity?

We are told to judge by the fruits. What *are* the fruits of two or three people deciding they can make doctrinal and administrative judgments? We need look no further than the dividing and redividing of groups in today's greater church of God to see that the fruits are not good.

Scattered sheep are just that: scattered and in grave danger. Contrast the dubious idea of Christ giving administrative authority to two or three scattered sheep to the very clear and powerful administrative authority given to Peter as head administrator of the church in Matthew 16:18 (see also John 21:15-17). Compare also Hebrews 5:4 where no man can take the office of high priest to himself. Can any of us decide we are the final word? Can we take any office in the priesthood to ourselves? God compares presumption to witchcraft (I Samuel 15:23).

Origin of the Ministry

Where did the ministry originate? In Matthew 16:18, Christ gives authority to Peter and the apostles who in turn ordained others. Ephesians 4:11-12 shows *Christ* gave the offices in the ministry and for express purposes: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." In II Corinthians 10:8, Paul adds, "our authority . . . *the Lord gave us* for edification and not for your destruction. . . ."

Let us carry this one step further: *Without a true ministry, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God!* How so? "And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? . . . So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14-15, 17). The belief required for salvation comes from hearing God's Word! We, God's begotten offspring, did not hear or understand the TRUE gospel until we heard it from the one sent by God. He was ordained by a remnant of true believers that have existed down through the centuries. We do not have to search history to find the continuous thread. **GOD SAYS** His church, including leadership as a necessary part, will not die out—it will continue to the end (Matthew 28:20; 16:18).

We have seen GOD gave the ministry as His gift to the church. How else would we have heard the truth? How else would we have been baptized? How else would we receive the Holy Spirit except by the laying on of hands by those who have been authorized to do so?

Simon Magus realized there was only one way to receive the Holy Spirit. He tried to buy it, but Peter repudiated him (Acts 8:9-24). Simon then started his own church, but the Holy Spirit has never been in it. He

apparently turned to Satan for power, establishing the False Church with a false spirit, a false gospel and a false ministry.

A Shepherd Like David

God's flock is currently scattered and, it would seem, in grave danger. Some today say that they only need Christ as their Shepherd, and they can continue as a flock of one. God knows they cannot spiritually survive such a solitary, self-imposed exile.

Are we so vain and self-righteous as to think we can exist alone in a spiritual wilderness of wolves, bears, lions, disease and drought? If so, we do not understand much of the nature and abilities of sheep! Pigs and goats can become wild or feral and thrive, but domestic sheep do not adapt to unattended life. They do not survive!

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-13), the 99 were safely in the fold. They were not in danger! The *one* that "goes astray"—that is, wanders from the flock—was in trouble.

God says in Ezekiel 34:23, "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them." Using Galatians 6:16 as a principle—that the church is spiritual Israel—the prophecies show Christ will appoint one shepherd to gather His flock scattered by a rebellious ministry. If the first half of Ezekiel 34 applies to today's ministry in the church, then the latter half, appointing a type of David, also applies now (see Isaiah 55:1-4; Zechariah 12:3, 7-10; 13:1).

God understands His scattered, broken, diseased sheep are in grave danger unless rescued. That is why He will appoint a shepherd in the spirit of David—to lead gently, surely, faithfully, righteously, in skillfulness and integrity (Psalm 78:70-72; Ezekiel 34:23-31). He is commissioned to tend and keep God's flock lest the sheep be totally destroyed.

As sheep, then, do we have an obligation to find a true ministry? Rather than going out into a dangerous wilderness alone or in twos and threes, we should seek a proper shepherd. Obviously, we would look for a ministry that has continued in the "faith once delivered" and is repentant and humble.

The life of David illustrates this point (I Samuel 22:1-2). He did not seek to build an army or gather a "flock." When they heard of him and what kind of man he was, the people sought and found him! His brothers, his father's household and those in distress, in debt and discontented came to him.

Jesus emphatically states, "There will be *ONE* flock and *ONE* shepherd" (John 10:16). However, we have hope for unity even before Christ's return. Rather than fight church government, we should be praying that God will soon send one in the spirit and attitude of David, that we might again be one flock, safely at rest in the mountains of Israel.

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The apostle Paul warned Timothy that the last days would be “perilous times” (II Timothy 3:1). However, very few of us ever imagined how difficult being a member of God’s true church would be!

We have seen the church break up into several smaller organizations, and the people have scattered here and there around the world. What is a Christian to do? Should he remain independent of any group, or should he “test the waters” among the scattered churches?

What is the wisest course to follow in these days of confusion and turmoil?

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